



US009174889B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Epshteyn et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,174,889 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Nov. 3, 2015**

(54) **METAL HYDRIDE NANOPARTICLES**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 2107 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **12/323,617**

(22) Filed: **Nov. 26, 2008**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2012/0090743 A1 Apr. 19, 2012

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 60/990,004, filed on Nov.
26, 2007.

(51) **Int. Cl.**

B22F 1/00 (2006.01)
B22F 1/02 (2006.01)
C22C 1/05 (2006.01)
C06B 45/00 (2006.01)
D03D 23/00 (2006.01)
D03D 43/00 (2006.01)
C06B 45/32 (2006.01)
B82Y 30/00 (2011.01)
B82Y 40/00 (2011.01)
B22F 9/24 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **C06B 45/32** (2013.01); **B22F 1/0018**
(2013.01); **B22F 1/0062** (2013.01); **B22F 9/24**
(2013.01); **B82Y 30/00** (2013.01); **B82Y 40/00**
(2013.01); **B22F 2998/10** (2013.01); **B22F**
2999/00 (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

USPC 149/7, 2, 108.2, 109.4; 75/255; 253
See application file for complete search history.

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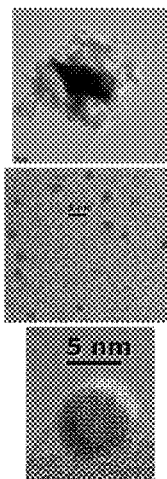
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A nanoparticle of a decomposition product of a transition
metal aluminum hydride compound, a transition metal boro-
hydride compound, or a transition metal gallium hydride
compound. A process of: reacting a transition metal salt with
an aluminum hydride compound, a borohydride compound,
or a gallium hydride compound to produce one or more of the
nanoparticles. The reaction occurs in solution while being
sonicated at a temperature at which the metal hydride com-
pound decomposes. A process of: reacting a nanoparticle with
a compound containing at least two hydroxyl groups to form
a coating having multi-dentate metal-alkoxides.

14 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



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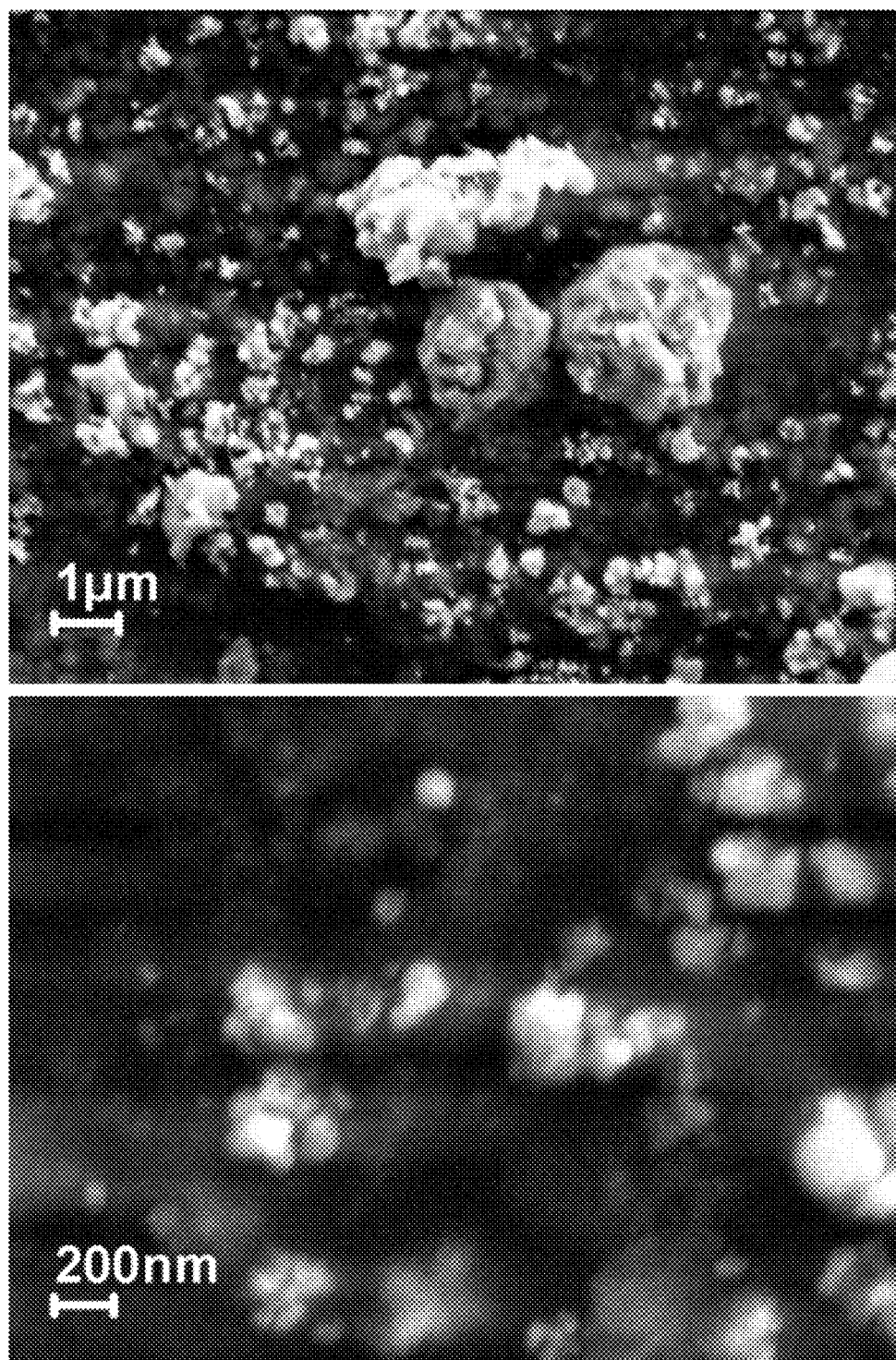


Fig. 1

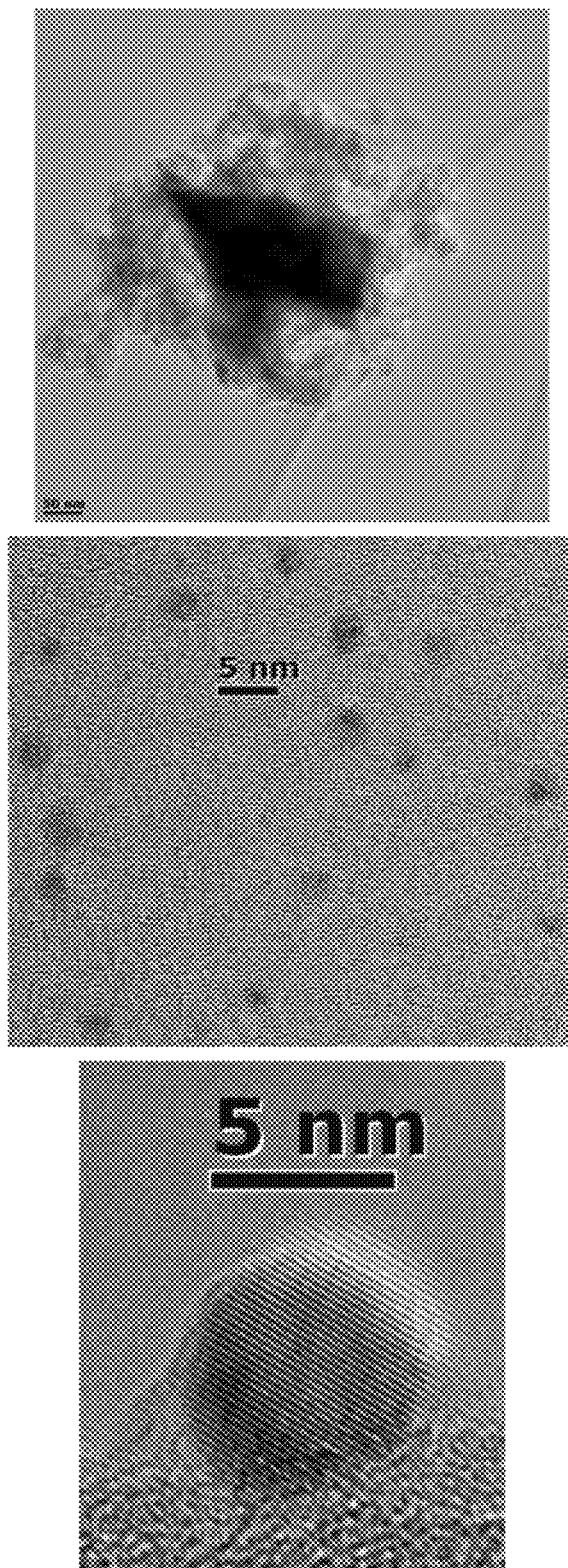


Fig. 2

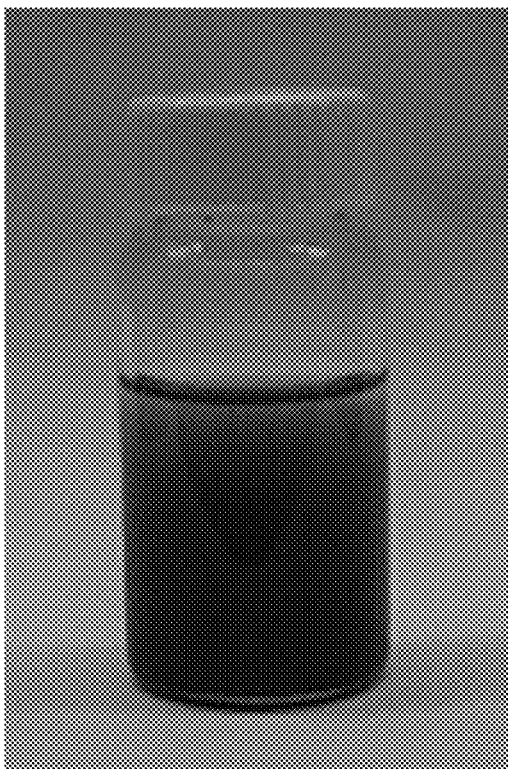
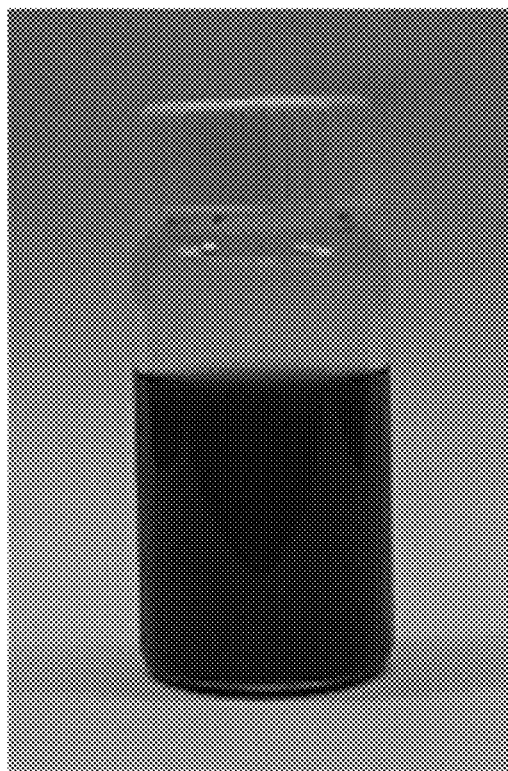
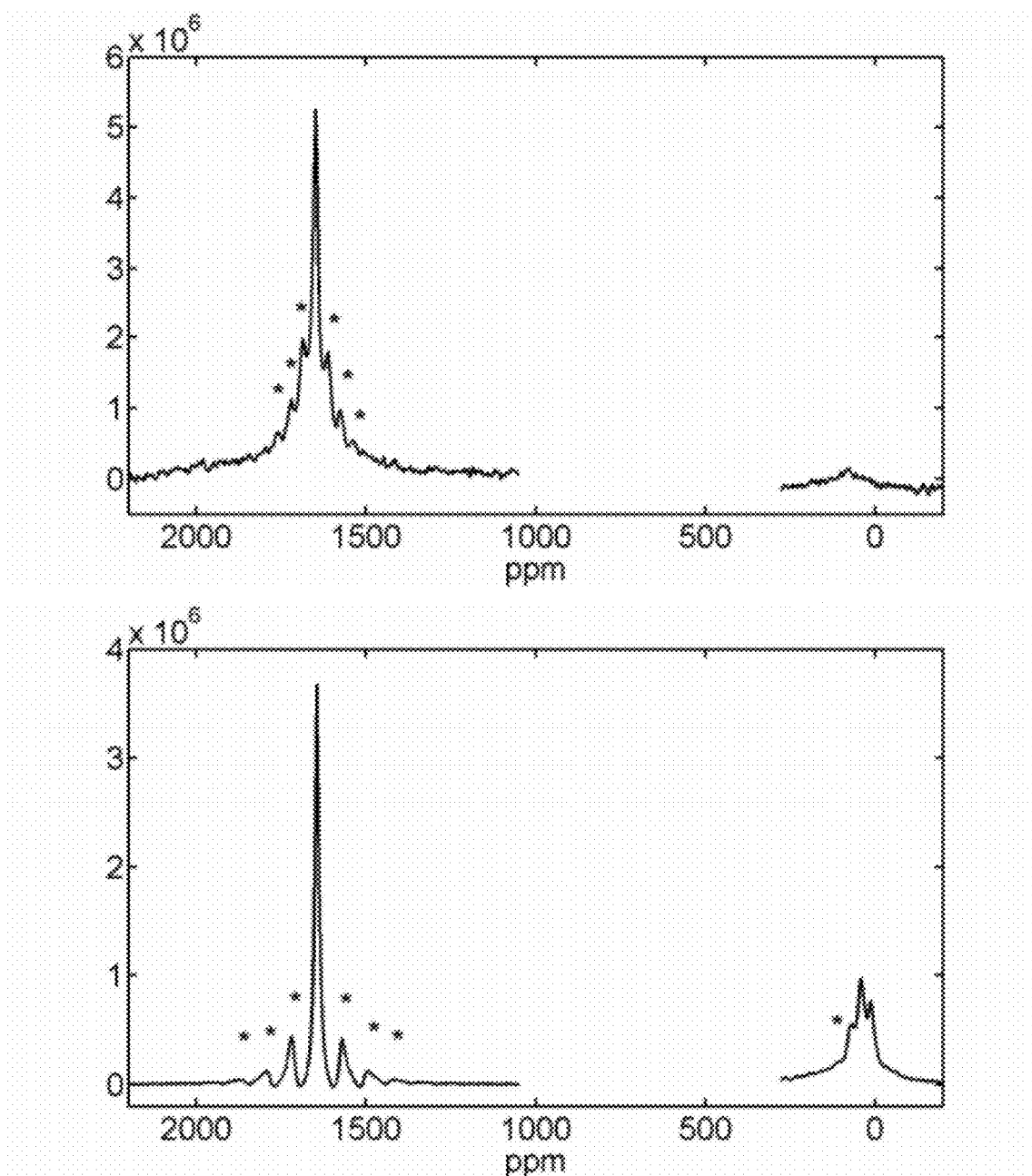


Fig. 3

*Fig. 4*

METAL HYDRIDE NANOPARTICLES

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/990,004, filed on Nov. 26, 2007. The provisional application and all other publications and patent documents referenced throughout the provisional application and this nonprovisional application are incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

The disclosed materials and methods are generally related to metal and metal-hydride nanoparticles.

DESCRIPTION OF RELATED ART

Generally the currently used materials for metalizing of energetic formulations are micron scale aluminum particles. The main problems associated with the burn properties of the traditional metal additives in energetic formulations have to do with the burn kinetics/speed being impeded by the aluminum oxide coating of the particles which arises naturally from the materials being exposed to air. The nanoscale Al materials with various passivators for energetic formulations have been explored on an experimental basis (Berry et al., "Synthesis and characterization of a nanophase zirconium powder" *J. of Mat. Chem.*, 13, 2388-2393 (2003); Jouet et al., "Surface Passivation of Bare Aluminum Nanoparticles Using Perfluoroalkyl Carboxylic Acids" *Chem. of Mat.*, 17, 2987-2996 (2005); Jouet et al., "Preparation and reactivity analysis of novel perfluoroalkyl coated aluminum nanocomposites" *Mat. Sci. Technol.*, 22, 422-429 (2006)).

Larger scale synthesis of air and moisture sensitive metal nanoparticles is a challenge, and poses an obstacle to investigating the physical properties of the nano-scale materials via traditional techniques that expose the materials to air. To obtain materials that do not oxidize when handled in air while still retaining their properties, the surface of the nanoparticles can be protected by a passivating agent. In order to keep the intrinsic properties of the unpassivated material, it is desirable to maximize the active metal content of the material while minimizing the amount of passivator present on the nanoparticle surface.

BRIEF SUMMARY

Disclosed herein is a nanoparticle comprising a decomposition product of a metal hydride compound. The metal hydride compound is a transition metal aluminum hydride compound, a transition metal borohydride compound, or a transition metal gallium hydride compound.

Also disclosed herein is a process comprising: reacting a transition metal salt with an aluminum hydride compound, a borohydride compound, or a gallium hydride compound to produce one or more nanoparticles comprising a decomposition product of the metal hydride compound. The reaction occurs in solution while being sonicated at a temperature at which the metal hydride compound decomposes.

Also disclosed herein is a process comprising: reacting a nanoparticle with a compound containing at least two hydroxyl groups to form a coating comprising multi-dentate metal-alkoxides. The nanoparticle comprises a metal that reacts with hydroxyl groups to form the metal-alkoxides.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A more complete appreciation of the invention will be readily obtained by reference to the following Description of the Example Embodiments and the accompanying drawings.

FIG. 1 shows SEM micrographs of material 4 (Example 4) showing the blurring that occurs at higher magnification (bottom) as compared to lower magnification (top)

FIG. 2 shows TEM micrographs of material 3 (Example 3). Top: large particle enveloped in metal-alkoxide; Center: a population of small nanoparticles on carbon background; Bottom: lattice fringing observed from nanoparticle overhanging on edge of carbon grid.

FIG. 3 shows material 5 (Example 5) initially (top) and after 24 h in dH_2O (bottom)

FIG. 4 shows ^{27}Al -NMR of material 2 (Example 2) annealed at 89°C . under dynamic vacuum overnight (top) vs. ^{27}Al -NMR material 5 (bottom). Asterisks denote spinning side-bands.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXAMPLE EMBODIMENTS

In the following description, for purposes of explanation and not limitation, specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present disclosure. However, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that the present subject matter may be practiced in other embodiments that depart from these specific details. In other instances, detailed descriptions of well-known methods and devices are omitted so as to not obscure the present disclosure with unnecessary detail.

Disclosed is a homogeneous solution-based method used to produce well-defined passivated air and moisture stable transition metal aluminum/boron/gallium hydride nanoparticle materials. The synthesis may be accomplished via a multi-step process. A transition metal salt is reacted with an aluminum hydride compound, a borohydride compound, or a gallium hydride compound. The reaction occurs at a temperature at which the resulting transition metal hydride compound decomposes. For example, ZrCl_4 or $\text{Zr}(\text{BH}_4)_4$ may be reacted with LiAlH_4 at room temperature. $\text{Zr}(\text{AlH}_4)_4$ is produced, which decomposes at room temperature. The metal hydride compounds can contain hydrogen-bridging bonds, which may break during decomposition. This results in the loss of some, but not necessarily all of the hydrogen in the nanoparticles in the form of hydrogen gas. The use of sonication in solution may cause nucleation of the decomposition products so that nanoparticles are formed.

Suitable transition metals in the transition metal salt include, but are not limited to, zirconium, hafnium, titanium, vanadium, scandium, yttrium, niobium, chromium, tantalum, thorium, or uranium. Reaction of a hafnium salt with a borohydride may produce HfB_2 as a decomposition product, which has a particularly high volumetric heat of combustion.

The nanoparticles may be annealed after they are formed. Annealing can convert amorphous material into crystalline material, and may drive off some or all of the remaining hydrogen. It may also cause reaction of some or all of any unreacted salts remaining in the nanoparticles. The annealing may be performed under vacuum at a temperature that is up to from about one third to one half the melting point (Kelvin) of the decomposition product in order to drive the dehydrogenation reaction to completion and further nucleate and/or crystallize the particles.

In a next step, a coating is formed on the nanoparticle by reacting it with a compound containing at least two hydroxyl groups to form a coating comprising multi-dentate metal-alkoxides. Suitable compounds include, but are not limited to, glycerol, sorbitol, and a carbohydrate.

The coating may be in the form of a xerogel from heating the reaction followed by drying in a vacuum, which causes

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shrinkage of the gel and possible entrapped solvent. The aluminum or other metal can act as a crosslinking site for formation of the coating, as aluminum can bind to 6 oxygen atoms. The process may pull some aluminum or other metal atoms from the surface of the nanoparticle and into the coating.

A coating made from glycerol, a small molecule, may be relatively thick since the growing gel coating is more permeable for addition of more glycerol—a relatively small molecule. The thicker coatings may be desirable for gas permeable applications where the fraction of reactive metal is less important. Larger compounds such as sorbitol may form a thinner coating, which may be desirable for maximizing the reactive metal content for applications such as energetic materials. The resulting material may be air and moisture resistant/stable, and contain upwards of >90% of active metal by mass, and may be used as a metalizing additive for energetic formulations.

The same type of coating may also be formed on other types of nanoparticles that contain a metal that reacts with hydroxyl groups to form a metal-alkoxides. Suitable nanoparticles may contain aluminum, boron, silicon, zirconium, or hafnium, for example.

The initial reaction to produce the zirconium aluminum hydride was via decomposition of zirconium tetrahydroaluminate ($Zr(AlH_4)_4$) while exposed to ultrasound produced by a benchtop ultrasonic bath. The particles were surface passivated using carbohydrates and were shown to be stable in air and partially stable in water. TEM imaging suggests the existence of smaller particles made of a Zr—Al alloy that range in size from 1.8 nm to 7.9 nm in diameter and are interspersed with larger particles that range from tens to hundreds of nanometers in diameter. It was also shown that the carbohydrate-derived coating of the nanoparticles is present as an aluminum alkoxide gel surrounding the core particles.

Based on the initial characterization of materials 1-5 (Examples 1-5), these materials have been shown to contain mainly Zr and Al, and the passivated versions of these materials are robust and are air and moisture stable. Based on the elemental analysis results, in the best case, Zr and Al constitute more than 90% of material 5. It has also been shown that by varying the size of the carbohydrate that was used as the passivator it is possible to change the amount of passivator remaining on the surface of the nanoparticles. Based on the TEM images of the larger particles, combined with EDS data, it is possible to suggest a model for the structures that is cocoon-like. The cocoon shell consists of interlinked multi-dentate metal-alkoxides that form a polymeric shell (aerogel) that surrounds the metal-hydride particle.

This method can produce particles of smaller size that are moisture and air stable, which will enable better burn properties. This method can be extended to other higher density transition metals, such as Hf, Ta, Th, and U, which would produce much higher density materials, giving the munitions that carry it greater momentum while retaining the same burn/shock wave characteristics as the lighter metals currently used.

The following examples are given to illustrate specific applications. These specific examples are not intended to limit the scope of the disclosure in this application.

General—

All air and moisture sensitive manipulations were performed in a Vacuum Atmospheres glove box under an atmosphere of helium or via traditional Schlenk technique under an atmosphere of nitrogen. Dry diethyl ether (Et_2O) was purchased from Aldrich packaged under nitrogen in a Sure-Seal bottle, and was used without further purification. Glyc-

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erol was purchased from Aldrich and was vacuum distilled prior to use. Lithium aluminum hydride ($LiAlH_4$) was purchased from Aldrich and was further purified by dissolution in Et_2O , followed by vacuum filtration and removal of volatiles in vacuo. Lithium borohydride ($LiBH_4$) and zirconium (IV) chloride ($ZrCl_4$) was purchased from Aldrich and used as provided. Zirconium borohydride ($Zr(BH_4)_4$) was prepared as previously reported in literature (Reird et al. *J. Electrochem. Soc.*, 104(1), 21 (1957)). Oxygen bomb calorimetry was performed using a Parr model 1341 Oxygen Bomb calorimeter with a model 1104 Oxygen Combustion Bomb. Microanalysis was performed by Complete Analysis Laboratories, Inc. SEM imaging was performed using a LEO 1550. TEM imaging was performed using a JEOL 2200FS, equipped with a Gatan Ultrascan charge coupled device (CCD) camera. ^{27}Al —NMR was performed on a Bruker DMX500 at 11.7 T.

EXAMPLE 1

Synthesis of Material 1 from $ZrCl_4$ and $LiAlH_4$

From a 200 mL Schlenk flask a clear solution containing 665 mg of $LiAlH_4$ (LAH) in 80 mL of Et_2O was transferred dropwise via canula over 2 h to a round-bottom 300 mL storage flask fitted with teflon valve joint, which contained 1.02 g of $ZrCl_4$ suspended in 100 mL of Et_2O being sonicated in ice-water in a VWR 501-IT benchtop ultrasonic cleaning bath. Upon initial addition a white precipitate appeared in solution, producing a white slurry. Once the addition was completed, the flask was closed with a Kontes Teflon valve and allowed to sonicate overnight at $\sim 50^\circ C$. (ultrasonic bath operating temperature) producing a black slurry. Volatiles were then removed in vacuo and 1.81 g of solids was isolated. The material was placed into a Pyrex sublimator and heated to $340^\circ C$. under dynamic vacuum. 1.66 g of the product black powder 1 was isolated.

EXAMPLE 2

Synthesis of Material 2 from $Zr(BH_4)_4$ and LAH

From a 200 mL Schlenk flask a clear solution containing 3.49 g of LAH in 120 mL of Et_2O was transferred dropwise via canula over 2 h to a round-bottom 500 mL storage flask fitted with teflon valve joint, which contained 3.46 g of $Zr(BH_4)_4$ dissolved in 100 mL of Et_2O and the reaction was performed in the same manner as synthesis of material 1. Following the initial reaction, the flask was then taken into a glovebox, and a black powder material was centrifuged out of the slurry using a benchtop centrifuge inside the glovebox. The black powder was then washed three times with 80 mL portions of Et_2O by mixing the powder and the Et_2O using a Pasteur pipette and centrifuging the material back out of the slurry. The material was then placed into a vacuum bulb and dried at room temperature (RT) under dynamic vacuum overnight to ~ 200 torr, producing 5.25 g of black powder material 2.

EXAMPLE 3

Passivation of Material 1 with Glycerol to Make Material 3

1.51 g of 1 was mixed with 5 mL of glycerol in a 100 mL Schlenk flask with a ground-glass stopper. It was then placed on a Schlenk line and the flask was heated overnight in a

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paraffin oil bath to 125° C., initially producing visible bubbling, which eventually subsided. The material was then cooled to RT and washed with ethanol (EtOH) in air and spun down in a benchtop high-speed centrifuge. The product black powder was dried under dynamic vacuum at 40° C. producing 1.67 g of product black powder 3.

EXAMPLE 4

Passivation of material 2 with glycerol to make material 4

1.03 g of 2 was placed in a 20 mL vial and mixed with 2 mL of glycerol by manual agitation. Upon mixing with the glycerol the material formed a black suspension which was visibly gently frothing. The foaming subsided after 1 h, and the vial containing the slurry was heated to about ~50° C. The reaction began to foam vigorously, which necessitated the transfer of approximately half of the reaction to a second 20 mL vial. The vials were allowed to stand at ~50° C. for two days after which they were taken out of the glovebox, and portions of EtOH were added to them to wash away the glycerol. The material visibly reacted with the EtOH producing bubbling. After three EtOH wash and centrifugation cycles the bubbling was no longer noticeable. 1.30 g of black powder material 5 was recovered after drying under dynamic vacuum overnight, and taken into the glovebox for storage.

EXAMPLE 5

Passivation of material 2 with D-sorbitol to make material 5

In the glovebox, 372 mg of powder 2 was mixed with ~1.5 g of D-sorbitol powder in a 50 mL beaker and gently heated on a hot-plate until melting of the sorbitol was observed. The entirety of the contents of the beaker was allowed to melt while the suspension was manually agitated to mix it thoroughly. The liquid was visibly frothing and was allowed to stand on the hotplate overnight at ~110° C. Immediately following, ~2.5 g of glycerol was added to the mixture and stirred in with a spatula. The black suspension was then allowed to cool to RT and taken out of the glovebox, after which 10 mL of EtOH was added and mixed into the suspension. This produced mild but visible bubbling, indicating a reaction of EtOH with the particles. The material was repeatedly washed with 40 mL portions of EtOH and spun down in a benchtop centrifuge in order to remove any remaining excess sorbitol and glycerol. The material was then dried at RT under dynamic vacuum overnight producing 433 mg of product black powder 5.

EXAMPLE 6

SEM

The particles that were observed by SEM showed a wide distribution of sizes. The SEM images of materials 3, 4, and 5 were significantly limited with blurring occurring at higher magnifications due to charging on the surface of the particles, as would be expected from particles that are non-conductive (see FIG. 1).

EXAMPLE 7

TEM

TEM images of sample 3 suggest that it is a material made up of a mixture of particles that are heterogeneous in size,

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with the bulk of it made up of larger particles with diameter on the order of hundred(s) nanometers, which contain a core with a diameter of about half the total particle's diameter that is made up of a zirconium and aluminum material (FIG. 2). These cores are encased in cocoon-like shells made up of aluminum alkoxides. EDS performed on the central dark portion of the large particle seen on the top in FIG. 2 exhibited peaks for Al and Zr almost exclusively, while the surrounding material that appears to be amorphous exhibited peaks for Al, C, and O.

As seen in the center and bottom images of FIG. 2, there is TEM evidence of much smaller nanoparticles that range from 1.8 nm to 7.4 nm in diameter. Crystal lattice fringing is observed for these nanoparticles in the TEM images with d-spacings of 2.08, 2.10, 2.19, and 2.21 Å, which do not match any oxide or hydride phases of Al and Zr, however, there are mixed Zr—Al alloy phases that have peaks in the observed range, suggesting that the small nanoparticles are probably Zr—Al alloys (JCPDS Ref. #s 13-510, 16-75, 17-891). Any attempts to perform EDS on these particles were unsuccessful due to their small size.

EXAMPLE 8

Microanalysis and Oxygen Bomb Calorimetry

The microanalysis results from materials 1-5 are shown in Table 1. The passivated materials to be analyzed were shipped under air, while the unpassivated materials were shipped under helium. The results for C, H, and N are reported as an average of two trials no more than 0.10% different from one another.

TABLE 1

Microanalysis results for materials 1-5							
Material	% C	% H	% N	% Al	% Zr	R	R/% C
1							
2	7.03	2.01	0.59	46.42	39.24	4.71	0.67
3	13.94	1.90	0.58	40.27	34.02	9.29	0.67
4	10.95	2.59	0.096				
5	4.35	1.27	trace	49.58	41.91	2.89	0.66

The metal content for the samples was determined by atomic absorption (AA). Column R (remainder) in Table 1 gives the value of the remainder from 100%, presumed to be 0 content as supported by the constant ratio of R to % C for the passivated samples 3-5 (last column of Table 1). From these results it is apparent that materials 3, 4, and 5 are passivated against short-term (several days) air degradation. Furthermore, material 5 was stored in air for 15 days prior to being shipped for microanalysis, and it still exhibits the best mass ratio of metal to passivator (organic portion).

According to the CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics, the heats of combustion of Zr and Al metals in O₂ are 2.9 kcal/g and 7.4 kcal/g, respectively. Since carbohydrates have been used as passivating agent and when burned carbohydrates yield approximately 4 kcal/g, it would follow that the nanoparticles should fall somewhere between 2.9 and 7.4 kcal/g. The results from oxygen bomb calorimetry for materials 2-5 are reported in Table 2, with the reported ΔH_{obs} values being the observed heat output, and not the actual. (The actual ΔH values were not obtained due to the material reacting with O₂ prior to ignition.)

TABLE 2

Oxygen bomb calorimetry data for materials 2-5		
#	Conditions	ΔH_{obs} (kcal/g)
2	@ 30 atm O ₂	1.48
3	@ 30 atm O ₂	4.01
4	@ 30 atm O ₂	4.34
5	@ 30 atm O ₂	3.56
5	@ 40 atm O ₂	2.11
5	in paraffin wax @ 40 atm O ₂	2.01
5	aged 24 h in dH ₂ O @ 40 atm O ₂	4.61

From the calorimetry data it is evident that the unprotected particles of material 2 are mostly oxidized before ignition occurs, as compared to the protected materials 4 and 5, which were made from 2. Another interesting observation is the difference in combustion energy output observed for material 5 when combusted at 30 versus 40 atm of O₂. The significantly lower energy output at the higher pressure confirms that even when passivated, the material reacts with O₂ prior to ignition. These previous calorimetry experiments were conducted in the presence of a known amount of ethylene glycol or glycerin, however, another attempt was made to obtain calorimetry data from material 5 by embedding it into paraffin wax; however, that yielded the same results as with ethylene glycol, showing that paraffin is inadequate at protecting the particles from 40 atm of O₂. Probably the most surprising result from calorimetry was the energy output observed for material 5 after it was dispersed in water for 24 h. The material was suspended in water and allowed to stand overnight as an experiment to observe how it would settle out, as seen in FIG. 3. The observed heat output from the water-treated material 5 was actually higher than for the same material before water treatment, suggesting that water reacts with the material's surface at least partially preventing O₂ from spontaneously reacting with particles. This is also supported by the observation of a slight evolution of gas bubbles when the particles were mixed with water. These results show that material 5 contains at least 4.61 kcal/g.

EXAMPLE 9

²⁷Al Magic Angle Spinning NMR

From magic angle spinning experiments it was found that the unpassivated nanoparticle materials are electrically conductive, since they were producing eddy currents counteracting the instrument's magnetic field thereby resisting spinning. On the other hand, the passivated materials were found to be non-conductive and had no problem spinning.

Initial magic angle spinning ²⁷Al—NMR experiments have shown that there are two main peak regions for the Zr—Al nanoparticle materials, with the Al metal peak at 1646 ppm (relative to Al³⁺ in H₂O) and the Al non-metal peaks have been observed in the 0-100 ppm region. As shown in FIG. 4, the unpassivated material exhibits a much smaller non-metal Al peak, whereas the passivated material has a significant non-metal Al peak.

EXAMPLE 10

Synthesis of Hf—Al-Nanoparticle Material from Hf(BH₄)₄ and LAH

From a 200 mL Schlenk flask a clear solution containing 3.77 g of LAH in 120 mL of Et₂O was transferred dropwise via canula over 2 h to a round-bottom 500 mL storage flask fitted with teflon valve joint, which contained 5.90 g of

Hf(BH₄)₄ dissolved in 100 mL of Et₂O while cooled to 0° C. and the reaction was sonicated overnight producing a black slurry. Following the initial reaction, the flask was then taken into a glovebox, and a black powder material was centrifuged out of the slurry using a benchtop centrifuge inside the glovebox. The black powder was then washed three times with 80 mL portions of Et₂O by mixing the powder and the Et₂O using a Pasteur pipette and centrifuging the material back out of the slurry. The material was then placed into a vacuum bulb and dried at 120° C. under dynamic vacuum overnight to ~200 torr, producing 7.08 g of black powder material.

Many modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teachings. It is therefore to be understood that the claimed subject matter may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described. Any reference to claim elements in the singular, e.g., using the articles “a,” “an,” “the,” or “said” is not construed as limiting the element to the singular.

What is claimed is:

1. A nanoparticle comprising a metal hydride-containing decomposition product of a metal hydride compound; wherein the metal hydride compound is a transition metal aluminum hydride compound, a transition metal borohydride compound, or a transition metal gallium hydride compound.
2. The nanoparticle of claim 1, wherein the transition metal is zirconium, hafnium, titanium, vanadium, scandium, yttrium, niobium, chromium, tantalum, thorium, or uranium.
3. The nanoparticle of claim 1, wherein the nanoparticle is made by:
 - reacting a transition metal salt with an aluminum hydride compound, a borohydride compound, or a gallium hydride compound to produce the metal hydride compound; wherein the reaction occurs in solution while being sonicated at a temperature at which the metal hydride compound decomposes.
4. The nanoparticle of claim 3, wherein the transition metal salt is ZrCl₄, Zr(BH₄)₄, or Hf(BH₄)₄ and the aluminum hydride compound is LiAlH₄.
5. The nanoparticle of claim 1, further comprising: a coating comprising multi-dentate metal-alkoxides.
6. The nanoparticle of claim 5, wherein the coating is a xerogel.
7. The nanoparticle of claim 5, wherein the coating is formed by reacting the uncoated nanoparticle with a compound containing at least two hydroxyl groups.
8. The nanoparticle of claim 7, wherein the compound is glycerol, sorbitol, or a carbohydrate.
9. A nanoparticle made by:
 - reacting ZrCl₄, Zr(BH₄)₄, or Hf(BH₄)₄ with an aluminum hydride compound, a borohydride compound, or a gallium hydride compound to produce a metal hydride compound; and
 - decomposing the metal hydride compound; wherein the decomposing occurs in solution while being sonicated at a temperature at which the metal hydride compound decomposes.
10. The nanoparticle of claim 9, wherein the aluminum hydride compound is LiAlH₄.
11. The nanoparticle of claim 9, further comprising: a coating comprising multi-dentate metal-alkoxides.
12. The nanoparticle of claim 11, wherein the coating is a xerogel.
13. The nanoparticle of claim 11, wherein the coating is formed by reacting the uncoated nanoparticle with a compound containing at least two hydroxyl groups.
14. The nanoparticle of claim 6, wherein the compound is glycerol, sorbitol, or a carbohydrate.

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